United Nations A/55/940–S/2001/483

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
15 May 2001
English
Original: French

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 74 (a)
Review and implementation of the Concluding Document of the Twelfth Special Session of the General Assembly: regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Security Council
Fifty-sixth year

Letter dated 11 May 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith the report of the fifteenth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, held in Bujumbura from 16 to 20 April 2001 (see annex).

After reviewing the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa and discussing the status of intergovernmental cooperation in security matters in the countries members of the Committee, the meeting undertook a thoroughgoing evaluation of the implementation of the Advisory Committee's previous decisions and recommendations. It also considered the implementation of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Proliferation of and Illicit Traffic in Small Arms in Central Africa, held in N'Djamena from 25 to 27 October 1999, and of the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa, held in Bujumbura from 14 to 16 August 2000.

The Standing Advisory Committee expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the support of the United Nations and counts on its future support so that we may achieve our objectives.

I should therefore be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 74 (a), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Marc **Nteturuye**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 11 May 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Report of the fifteenth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (Bujumbura, 16-20 April 2001)

Introduction

The fifteenth ministerial meeting of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa was held in Bujumbura from 16 to 20 April 2001.

The following member States took part in the meeting: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe did not attend.

Representatives of the Secretaries-General of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) also participated in the work.

The opening ceremony featured:

- A message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, read out by Mr. Moktar Cisse, Resident Coordinator a.i.;
- A statement by the representative of the Secretary-General of OAU, H.E. Ambassador Mamadou Bah;
- A statement by H.E. Ambassador Nelson Cosme, Deputy Secretary-General of ECCAS;
- The opening address by H.E. Mr. Frédéric Bamvuginyumvira, First Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi.

His Excellency Mr. Séverin Ntahomvukiye, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi, presided over the closing ceremony.

Adoption of the agenda

The Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. Interim report of the Bureau.
3. Review of the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa.
4. Intergovernmental cooperation in security matters in Central Africa.
5. Evaluation of the implementation of the previous decisions and recommendations of the Advisory Committee.
   (a) Establishment of an early warning mechanism;
   (b) Organization of military exercises in connection with peacekeeping operations between the armed forces of the countries of Central Africa;
   (c) Establishment of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX);
   (d) Establishment of a subregional parliament in Central Africa;
   (e) Establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.
6. Briefing on the Subregional Workshop on Human Rights Education in Central Africa.
7. Implementation of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Proliferation of and Illicit Traffic in Small Arms in Central Africa and briefing on the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.
8. Implementation of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa.
9. Date of the next meeting.

10. Other matters.

11. Adoption of the report of the fifteenth ministerial meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee.

Conduct of work

I. Interim report of the Bureau

The Committee took note of the interim report presented by H.E. Mr. Luc Rukingama, Minister of Communications and Spokesman for the Government of the Republic of Burundi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Bureau at the ministerial level.

The Committee welcomed the energetic and effective way in which the Bureau had discharged the mandates entrusted to it by the fourteenth ministerial meeting with regard, in particular, to the raising of awareness among the countries of the subregion concerning the importance of signing and/or ratifying the Non-Aggression Pact, the Mutual Assistance Pact and the Protocol on the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX); the organization of the fifteenth ministerial meeting; the steps taken with a view to the effective launching of COPAX; and the establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy.

II. Review of the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa

Angola

The Committee expressed concern at the continuing conflict in Angola, especially owing to the repeated attacks by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and their tragic consequences for peace, security, stability and development in Angola and the well-being of its peoples.

It expressed its support for the Angolan Government's efforts to restore peace, security and stability throughout the territory and to protect the civilian population.

It called on the international community to provide assistance to displaced persons in Angola.

The Committee also welcomed the Angolan Government's efforts to bring about national reconciliation, in particular the offer of amnesty made by President José Eduardo Dos Santos to UNITA combatants who turn in their weapons.

It invited UNITA to renounce the pursuit of war and instead promote national reconciliation and peace for the benefit of all Angolans under the terms of the Lusaka Protocol.

The Committee called on all Central African countries to comply strictly with the sanctions imposed on UNITA by the United Nations Security Council.

Burundi

The Committee welcomed the signing on 28 August 2000 in Arusha of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi, which is a source of real hope.

It expressed its support for the efforts of the Burundian Government and all Burundians to bring about a lasting peace in their country.

The Committee paid tribute to the efforts being made by the Facilitator and the heads of State of some members of the Advisory Committee to bring peace to Burundi, and it encouraged them to continue these efforts.

The Committee expressed serious concern at the continuation and escalation of the violence being perpetrated against civilian populations by armed groups based in some of Burundi's neighbouring countries.

It invited the countries of the region, particularly those of the Great Lakes region, to help the Burundians restore peace through dialogue and reconciliation and not to encourage violence and war in Burundi. It welcomed the talks being organized to that end between the competent authorities of Burundi and those of some neighbouring countries.

The Committee addressed a solemn appeal to all armed movements to turn in their weapons immediately and engage in negotiations for a total and permanent ceasefire.

It urged all Burundian parties to endeavour to promote national reconciliation and restoration of peace in Burundi, thereby enabling the Peace

Agreement to be fully implemented and the peaceful transition to begin.

The Committee urgently appealed to the international community to provide substantial support for the peace efforts in Burundi, especially by fulfilling the promise of assistance made at the International Donors Conference for Burundi, held in Paris on 11 and 12 December 2000.

Cameroon

The Committee paid tribute to the consolidation of a climate of peace and stability in Cameroon.

The Committee welcomed the Cameroonian Government's pursuit of a policy of dialogue in the context of the establishment of a consensus-based democracy that will promote the country's harmonious development.

It noted with satisfaction the adoption on 6 December 2000 by the National Assembly of an act establishing the National Office for the Monitoring of Elections to ensure the general supervision of all elections and referendums, and the elaboration, by the National Anti-Corruption Office, of a national programme to combat corruption.

The Committee welcomed the Cameroonian Government's determination to continue its campaign against insecurity in the cities, the commendable efforts it had made in that regard and notable successes already achieved.

The Committee had been informed that the Government of Cameroon had set up commissions of inquiry to investigate the case of the alleged disappearance of nine persons in Bépanda and the fire in a munitions depot in Yaoundé. It welcomed the preliminary findings about the cases and the steps taken by the competent authorities to bring the accused to justice.

It welcomed the Government of Cameroon's policy of good-neighbourliness towards the other countries of the subregion.

The Committee again expressed deep concern at the information provided by the delegation of Cameroon on the persistent attempts at infiltration and repeated acts of provocation by Nigerian forces on the Bakassi peninsula and other border points and again called on the two parties to refrain from any action that could heighten tensions pending the decision of the International Court of Justice, which Cameroon had seized of the matter.

The Committee, in addition to reiterating its appeal to the international community and friendly countries to assist in maintaining the peace between Cameroon and Nigeria while awaiting the verdict of the International Court of Justice, requested the Court to take the necessary steps to ensure a rapid conclusion of the proceeding pending before it.

The Committee again urged Nigeria to comply strictly with the interim measures of protection laid down by the Court in its ruling of 15 March 1996 and called upon the two parties to refrain from taking any action that could create difficulties for the application of the final judgement of the Court.

Gabon

The Committee noted with appreciation the climate of peace and political stability in Gabon.

It expressed its concern at the precarious living conditions of the many refugees in Gabon and urgently called on the international community, in particular the World Food Programme (WFP), to provide more food to these refugees.

Equatorial Guinea

The Committee welcomed the climate of peace and stability in Equatorial Guinea.

It noted with satisfaction the continuation of the democratic process in Equatorial Guinea and the favourable welcome given to the report recently submitted to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva by a delegation headed by the Prime Minister and representing all the recognized political parties in the country.

The Committee paid tribute to the efforts of the authorities of Equatorial Guinea to promote national consensus and, in particular, the amnesty granted at the end of 2000 by the head of State, H.E. Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, to those who had committed acts of terrorism on 21 January 1998.

It welcomed the resumption of cooperation between Equatorial New Guinea and Spain, as exemplified by a recent exchange of official visits.

Central African Republic

The Committee welcomed the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to put into effect the rules of good governance by taking firm action to combat corruption and the misappropriation of public funds.

The Committee expressed concern at the persistence of crime in the country's interior by armed gangs of "roadblockers" and noted with satisfaction the efforts being made by the Government of the Central African Republic to combat insecurity, including the following actions:

- Reinforcement of national legislation on possession of firearms;
- Campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers involved in possessing firearms;
- Organization of operations to collect and destroy illegal weapons;
- Strengthening of border control stations;
- Regulation of activities of security firms;
- Establishment of an interministerial committee to follow up the Advisory Committee's recommendations;
- Continuation of the programme on restructuring and redeploying Central African armed forces.

The Committee also welcomed the Government's efforts to ease social tensions, in particular by paying back wages and holding talks with trade union representatives.

Chad

The Committee welcomed the continuing democraticization process in Chad and, in particular, the steps taken to ensure that the forthcoming presidential elections are properly conducted.

It noted with satisfaction the Chadian security forces' successes in their campaign against armed "roadblockers" and organized crime in the cities, together with the positive results of the Government's efforts to ease tensions between livestock owners and farmers.

It expressed deep concern at the continuing attacks by the armed opposition, which had taken many lives and caused significant material damage.

It encouraged the Chadian authorities to pursue their policy of dialogue and openness towards the opposition in order to bring about national reconciliation among all Chadians.

It called on all parties in Chad to respond positively to this spirit of openness, and to give priority attention to reconciliation so as to protect the best interests of the Chadian people.

The Committee expressed its appreciation for the effective launching of the Chadian pipeline project and the promising prospects thereof for the development of Chad and the well-being of its peoples.

III. Intergovernmental cooperation in security matters in Central Africa

The Committee took note with satisfaction of the actions and initiatives taken by the member countries within the framework of cooperation in security matters, aimed, in particular, at lessening tensions, combating insecurity in the border areas and facilitating exchanges between the various national structures dealing with these questions.

In view of the cross-border nature of most of the security problems in the subregion and the need to respond to them in a joint and concerted manner, the Committee again strongly recommended greater cooperation and dialogue among the security forces of the Central African countries, particularly within the framework of periodic meetings and the organization of joint operations.

The Committee particularly welcomed:

- The convening of the joint commission between Angola and the Congo, and of the joint commission between Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- The signing of a framework agreement for tripartite cooperation between Angola, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- The meeting between the defence and security authorities of Burundi and their counterparts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- The success achieved through cooperation between the police forces of Cameroon and the Central African Republic, particularly in combating cross-border vehicle thefts;

- The cooperation between Cameroon and the Central African Republic in the training of officers of the armed forces of the Central African Republic, the police, the gendarmerie and customs officials;
- The consultations held between the administrative and military authorities of the Central African Republic and their counterparts in Cameroon to dispel misunderstandings and tensions among the peoples of the border areas;
- The organization of joint border patrols by the security forces of the Central African countries;
- The recent meeting of an ad hoc committee of the border commission for Equatorial Guinea and Gabon;
- The meeting of the border commission for Gabon and the Congo;
- The coordination meetings between the administrative and military authorities of the border areas to dispel tensions among the population and build confidence;
- The summit meetings on security questions held by the Central African countries at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

The Committee expressed its deep concern with regard to the upsurge in organized crime and insecurity in the countries of the subregion, particularly the development of the phenomenon of roadblocks. It recommended the intensification of information exchange and the organization of large-scale joint operations to combat this scourge. It recommended that a high-level meeting should be held on the question, aimed, in particular, at setting up a suitable legal framework for cooperation in the matter.

It stressed the need for closer cooperation among the security services of the various countries with a view to combating the cross-border trade in stolen vehicles.

Recalling the importance to the subregion's peace and security of the protocol relating to the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) and the Mutual Assistance Pact concluded at Malabo in February 2000 among the countries of Central Africa, the Committee recommended that the Bureau should draw the attention of those countries which had not already done so to the need to sign and/or ratify those instruments.

Aware of the need to strengthen cooperation for peace and security in the subregion, the Committee appealed to those countries that had not yet signed the agreement on criminal police cooperation, adopted in April 1999 at the meeting of the Committee of Central African Police Chiefs in Yaoundé, to take all necessary steps to proceed to the rapid signing of this text and guarantee its full effectiveness.

IV. Evaluation of the implementation of the previous decisions and recommendations of the Advisory Committee

A. Establishment of an early warning mechanism

The Committee welcomed the information provided by the Gabonese delegation concerning the completion of the refurbishing of the building made available to the mechanism by the Gabonese Government.

It welcomed the fact that the keys of the building had been handed over to the ECCAS secretariat by the Gabonese authorities.

It noted with satisfaction the contacts currently under way between ECCAS and the Gabonese Government with a view to the forthcoming inauguration of the building which is to house the early warning mechanism.

The Committee was also informed of high-level contacts between the ECCAS secretariat and various international partners, particularly the United Nations Office for Project Support Services and OAU, with a view to the operationalization of the early warning mechanism.

B. Organization of military exercises in connection with peacekeeping operations between the armed forces of the countries of Central Africa

The Committee reiterated its interest in organizing joint military exercises.

It repeated its recommendation that a meeting of the chiefs of staff of the Central African countries should be convened in order to review the Biyongho-98

exercise, revise its costs downwards and determine the division of contributions among the various countries.

The Committee noted with satisfaction the offer made by the Government of Gabon to host the meeting from 9 to 11 July 2001.

A mandate was given to the Bureau to take all the necessary steps, in conjunction with the Committee secretariat, for the organization of the meeting.

C. Establishment of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX)

The Committee welcomed the adoption of the terms of reference for the early warning mechanism, the Central African multinational force, and the defence and security commission for the Central African countries.

The Committee welcomed the ratification by several member countries of the legal instruments governing COPAX and the Mutual Assistance Pact and called on countries that had not yet done so to take the necessary steps to ratify these instruments.

D. Establishment of a subregional parliament in Central Africa

The Committee was informed of the continuing contacts between the ECCAS secretariat and the various member countries concerning the setting up of the network of parliamentarians established in Malabo on 24 June 2000.

It took note with satisfaction of the information provided by the delegation of Equatorial Guinea and by the Deputy Secretary-General of ECCAS with regard to the convening in Luanda in October 2000 of the meeting of experts responsible for finalizing the protocol setting up the network of parliamentarians, as well as its subsequent adoption in November 2000 in Luanda by the presiding officers of the various national parliaments.

A mandate was given to the Bureau of the Committee to continue to follow developments and to report on them at the next meeting.

E. Establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa

The Committee congratulated the Cameroonian Government, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the ECCAS secretariat on their combined efforts for the effective establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

It recommended that the Bureau and the secretariat should take all necessary steps for the early convening at Yaoundé of the meeting of experts to the documents governing the organization and functioning of the Centre.

It welcomed the offer of the Cameroonian Government to host the meeting in late May-early June 2001.

A mandate was given to the Bureau and the secretariat to transmit the drafts of the above-mentioned documents to all the member countries before the Yaoundé meeting.

V. Briefing on the subregional Workshop on Human Rights Education in Central Africa

The Committee noted with interest the briefing provided by the Deputy Secretary-General of ECCAS, H.E. Ambassador Nelson Cosme, concerning the Subregional Workshop on Human Rights Education in Central Africa, held at Yaoundé from 15 to 16 March 2001, in the context of the programme to launch the activities of the subregional centre for human rights and democracy in Central Africa.

It took note of the adoption at that time of the Yaoundé Declaration on human rights education in Central Africa.

VI. Implementation of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa

After reviewing the recommendations formulated by the Subregional Conference on the Question of

Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa, held at Bujumbura from 14 to 16 August 2000, the Committee welcomed the efforts made by the countries of the subregion to implement them.

In particular, the Committee noted with appreciation the establishment in several member countries of national commissions responsible for the management of issues relating to refugees and of the efforts made by the authorities of the countries of asylum to promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees in collaboration with the competent international agencies and, in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

It encouraged all the countries of the subregion to continue their efforts to alleviate the suffering of refugees and displaced persons in their territories while respecting the relevant international norms.

The Committee made an urgent appeal to the international community and, in particular, the United Nations specialized agencies to provide greater support to the many refugees and displaced persons in Central Africa, and to the countries of asylum.

VII. Implementation of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Proliferation of and Illicit Traffic in Small Arms in Central Africa and briefing on the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

After reviewing the recommendations formulated by the Subregional Conference on the Proliferation of and Illicit Traffic in Small Arms in Central Africa, held in N'Djamena from 25 to 27 October 1999, the Committee noted with satisfaction the efforts made by the countries of the subregion to implement them.

In particular, it welcomed the operations to disarm persons illegally possessing firearms, the organization of campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of firearms, the establishment in the various member countries of appropriate legislation governing the trade and ownership of firearms and the activities of private security firms, the strengthening of border controls, the organization of operations for the collection and destruction of weapons and measures taken to combat organized crime and roadblocks.

The Committee recommended that the member countries should intensify their efforts to implement the recommendations of the Conference and more generally to set up the struggle against the proliferation and illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons, bearing in mind the dangers posed by this scourge to the peace, security, stability and development of the subregion.

The Committee took note with interest of the briefing on the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects made by Mr. Ferdinand Ngoh Ngoh, expert from the Committee secretariat.

In particular, it welcomed the information concerning the incorporation in the draft programme of action to be submitted to the Conference of the recommendations of the Subregional Conference on the Proliferation of and Illicit Traffic in Small Arms in Central Africa, held in N'Djamena, and of the concerns set forth in the Bamako Declaration regarding the common African position on the proliferation, circulation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

It recommended that member countries should give appropriate instructions to their permanent missions to the United Nations at New York so that they would be able to participate actively in the various consultations on the draft programme of action in order to ensure that the concerns of the Central African countries are effectively taken into account.

The Committee urged the member countries to take an active part in the work of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects to be held at United Nations Headquarters, New York, from 9 to 20 July 2001.

VIII. Date of the next meeting

The Committee decided to hold its sixteenth ministerial meeting in ..... in the second week of August 2001.

It also decided to hold the subregional conference on the protection of women and children in armed conflicts prior to the sixteenth ministerial meeting.

IX. Other matters

The Committee urged member States to make regular contributions to the trust fund intended to finance its activities.

Lastly, the participants welcomed the favourable climate that had prevailed throughout their deliberations and expressed their appreciation to the President of the Republic of Burundi, H.E. Mr. Pierre Buyoya, and to the Burundian Government and people for the warm welcome and fraternal attentions paid to them during their stay in Burundi.

Bujumbura, 20 April 2001